

## NORAD-USNORTHCOM COLOR GUARD PERFORMS AT NBA ALL-STAR GAME

Feature

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The fans crowding the seats at Denver's Pepsi Center Sunday night may have come to see Shaq and Yao and other top players compete in the NBA's annual all-star game, but before the first ball could swish through a hoop, another all-star team took the court.



As spectators clapped and cheered, the eight members of the North American Aerospace Defense Command's U.S. Northern Command joint service color guard filed precisely onto the court, their flags held straight and steady, rifles resting on shoulders, uniforms sharp and faces solemn, military low-quarter shoes gleaming even more brightly than the polished wood beneath them.

On a stage at center court, the color guard joined members of the Air Force Academy choir, who sang the national anthem as the color guard rendered honors to the American flag.

During a rehearsal at Peterson Air Force Base the previous Friday afternoon, color guard director and senior enlisted advisor to the NORAD-USNORTHCOM commander, Sgt. Maj. D. Scott Frye, had warned the team to put on their "game faces" Sunday night.

"The cameras will be in your face, zooming in on you and doing close-ups when you don't even know it," he told them.

The team had plenty of time to anticipate being nationally televised, as they arrived at the Pepsi Center several hours before tip-off. Their designated half-hour rehearsal time was delayed while the singing group Destiny's Child occupied the stage and the color guard members waited on the sidelines.

After rehearsal, team members took advantage of their behind-the-scenes status to get photos and autographs of some of the players and performers, including Shaquille

NORAD-USNORTHCOM joint service color guard lines up behind members of the Air Force Academy choir during the opening ceremony of the NBA All-Star game Sunday in Denver. Color guard members are, left to right, Army Sgt. Leander Jones III, Sgt. 1st Class Martin Thomas, Spc. Charles Kemp, Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Kenneth Edwards, Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class David Diener, Air Force Staff Sgt. Tameshia Johnson, Coast Guard Petty Officer 1st Class Chris Meedel and Marine Corps Sgt. Grayson Warbritton.

Photo credit: Sgt. 1st Class Gail Braymen

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O'Neal, Tracy McGrady, Kevin Garnett, Antawn Jamison, Kobe Bryant and LeAnn Rimes.

Later in the day, shortly before their actual performance, the color guard members gave each other last-minute advice.

"Don't lock your knees." "Step up on the stage with your left foot." "Watch the head in front of you." "Get in the zone."

Sgt. 1st Class Martin Thomas, the team's noncommissioned officer-in-charge, carried the American flag. As the team waited for its cue to go on the court, he admitted to being "a little" nervous. But, he added, "I'm proud to be the face of the forces."

Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class David Diener, who carried the Navy flag, had his brother sitting in the stands at the Pepsi Center watching him perform. "He thinks it's the greatest thing in the world," Diener said. "He said, 'How'd you land that gig?'"

"I think it's great. Not too many people get to do this. It's truly an honor."

Air Force Staff Sgt. Tameshia Johnson, who carried the Air Force flag and has 12 years of color guard experience, also had family in the stands. "My brother, his wife and their son, and my best friend are here," she said.

After their performance, the color guard members stayed to watch the game.

"I mainly watch collegiate basketball," said Marine Corps Sgt. Grayson Warbritton, who carried a rifle in Sunday's performance. But he said he favored the All-Star West team to win, since he was a Lakers fan when he used to watch professional basketball.

Warbritton's team didn't win, but at least one of the color guard members felt like a winner.

"I feel good about (representing the armed forces) because it gives the services a chance to stand out and give honor to our nation," said Army Sgt. Leander Jones III, who carried a rifle. "It's a great privilege."

Other NORAD-USNORTHCOM joint service color guard members performing at the NBA All-Star game were Coast Guard Petty Officer 1st Class Chris Meedel carrying the Coast Guard flag, Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Kenneth Edwards carrying the Marine Corps flag and Spc. Charles Kemp carrying the Army flag.